

Still Buying Kibble? Please Heed This Safety Warning

If you make these common mistakes (as many owners do) with dry food, you could be exposing your pet to bacterial or fungal contamination, or even mite infestation. For your pet's well-being, follow these simple tips to help keep dry food optimal. Better yet, feed your pet this instead.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dry pet food, for all its convenience, is difficult to store in a way that preserves its nutritional value and freshness
- Many unhealthy things can occur in a bag of kibble — especially an open bag — including fat rancidity, bacterial and fungal growth, nutrient depletion and storage mite infestation
- Most dry pet food also has a number of other problems, including poor-quality, rendered and high-glycemic ingredients and extreme processing that creates cancerous byproducts
- If you're still buying kibble, there are several handling and storage guidelines you should follow to help prevent feeding unsafe food to your pet
- A much better alternative to kibble is a nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate diet containing high-quality animal protein, moisture, healthy fats and fiber, and low to no starch content

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Many pet parents who feed kibble (which isn't something I recommend — more about that in a bit) love the simplicity of buying it in bulk and simply pouring it into their dog's or cat's bowl at mealtime. But one of the many problems with this convenience pet food is it doesn't store well.

The truth: No "complete and balanced" pet food exists that is also shelf-stable. One example: As soon as a bag of kibble is opened, important dietary fats in the food start to go rancid, and long-term consumption of rancid fats can obviously negatively impact your pet's health.

Also, because kibble is processed multiple times and at extremely high temperatures, effectively killing all the nutrition in the food, manufacturers assume the finished product contains no micronutrients. That's why the final production step involves spraying on a nutrient mix (and a palatability enhancer to make pets want to eat the stuff).

The nutrient mix contains cheap, feed-grade vitamins (often from China), including metal oxides and sulfates that speed the oxidation of fats, ultimately resulting in rancid fats in a formula that may or may not be entirely safe to feed as little as a week after it was opened.

There's also significant potential for opportunistic bacteria and mycotoxins in dry pet food, and the longer the kibble is stored, the greater the risk to your pet and anyone in the family who handles the food. And as if all that wasn't bad enough, storage mites can also proliferate in dry food. These tiny mites start out in grain silos and from there find their way into dry foods like cereal, grains and kibble. Pets can develop a hypersensitivity to storage mites, resulting in itchy inflamed skin, hair loss and recurrent ear infections.

Why I'd Like to Do Away With Most Dry Pet Food

While most kibble is formulated to meet the basic nutritional requirements of dogs and cats, it certainly doesn't provide optimal nourishment for the long haul. I have several issues with dry pet food, but let's start with the quality of the raw ingredients.

Rendering plants create meat and bone meal from a variety of dubious sources, for example, parts of cows that can't be sold for human consumption, including bones, the digestive system, the brain, udders, hide and more. The vast majority of pet foods are made with ingredients rejected by the human food industry, meaning they're **feed-grade**.

They also may use the carcasses of diseased animals, expired grocery store meat (including the plastic and Styrofoam packaging), road kill, zoo animals and **dogs and cats that have been euthanized**. Here's a stomach-turning description of the process of spinning these raw ingredients into pet food from Slate:

"This material is slowly pulverized into one big blend of dead stuff and meat packaging. It is then transferred into a vat where it is heated for hours to between 220 [to] 270 degrees F. At such high temperatures, the fat and grease float to the top along with any fat-soluble compounds or solids that get mixed up with them.

Most viruses and bacteria are killed. The fat can then be skimmed off, packaged and renamed. Most of this material is called 'meat and bone meal.' It can be used in livestock feed, pet food or fertilizer ... There is essentially no federal enforcement of standards for the contents of pet food.

... Indeed, the same system that doesn't know whether its main ingredient is chicken beaks or Dachshund really cannot guarantee adequate nutrition to the dogs that eat it."¹

There is one dry food company, Carna4, that prides itself on using ethically sourced, humanely raised meats and no synthetic nutrients from China (unlike all the other brands). So if you must feed kibble, I suggest this brand. However, there are still other issues with kibble, in general.

More Problems With Kibble

The majority of dry pet food is a blend of poor-quality meats, byproducts and synthetic vitamins and minerals. In addition, most kibble contains high-glycemic, genetically engineered (GE) corn, wheat, rice or potato — grains and starches that have no place in a carnivore's diet and create metabolically stressful insulin, glucagon and cortisol spikes throughout the day.

In fact, many popular **grain-free diets** have a higher glycemic index than regular kibble due to the excessive amounts of starchy ingredients (e.g., potatoes, peas, lentils, tapioca) used in the formulas. As we know, carbs break down into sugar, which fuels degenerative conditions such as diabetes, obesity and cancer.

In the last 50 years, we've learned the hard way that feeding nutritionally unbalanced, biologically inappropriate diets to pets does not create health. In fact, chronic inflammatory and degenerative diseases in dogs and cats are at epidemic levels, and the problem can be traced directly to diet and lifestyle.

To make matters worse, the poor-quality proteins and fats used in most kibble, when processed at high temperatures, create **cancerous byproducts** such as heterocyclic amines. The meat that goes into dry pet food is put through at least four high-temperature cooking processes, leaving the digestibility, absorbability and overall nutrient value highly questionable.

The low moisture content of dry food is also problematic, especially for cats. Dry cat food provides only about one-tenth the amount of moisture cats receive from prey animals, living foods and even commercial canned diets, which puts significant stress on their kidneys and bladder. Dogs also tend to become excessively thirsty when fed a dry diet. The carb-heavy nature of dry food, along with overfeeding, is also a significant factor in rising rates of pet obesity.

Tips for Pet Parents Still Feeding Dry Diets

Don't buy in bulk. Instead, purchase enough for 30 days at a time. Check to make sure the food isn't near (or past) its use-by date, and also insure there are no tears in the bag. Since rancid fats are worse than no fats, I recommend buying formulas that do not contain added essential fatty acids (EFAs). Instead, add them fresh at mealtime. **Krill oil** is an excellent choice.

Dry food that sits in a warm or humid environment presents a greater risk for rancidity, bacterial and fungal growth, and other problems, so it's best to store most of it in the freezer, and remove just enough for one or two meals at a time. Kibble kept at room temperature (not recommended) should be in an airtight container that is washed frequently with detergent and hot (not warm) water.

When you open a new bag of kibble, don't pour the remainder of the old bag into it to avoid potential contamination of the new food. If you transfer the food to another container(s), you might want to write down the brand, variety, lot number and any other pertinent information in the event of a recall. I also recommend disposing of empty pet food bags immediately outside the house.

Ready to Kick the Kibble Habit Once and for All?

As regular readers here know, I recommend pet parents ditch dry food altogether and instead feed a nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate diet, which means food containing high-quality animal protein, moisture, healthy fats and fiber, with low to no starch content.

A nutritionally balanced raw or gently cooked **homemade diet is my top choice for pets**, but you should only attempt this if you're committed to doing it right. If you don't want to deal with balancing diets at home, a great alternative is to feed a pre-balanced, commercially available raw food. A freeze-dried/dehydrated diet is second best. Human-grade canned food is a mid-range choice, but can be hard to find.

And be sure to incorporate a variety of fresh foods into your pet's diet, too. Blueberries, chia and hemp seeds in coconut oil, raw pumpkin seeds, fermented vegetables and kefir can provide your furry family member with a variety of nutrition and flavors.

Sources and References

[Southwest Journal January 4, 2017](#)

¹ [Slate April 2013](#)
